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ABSTRACT

Youth for Education and Success (YES) has contracted with the Houston Independent School District (HISD) (Texas) to provide a community-based alternative school for HISD students who have dropped out of school and are considered at risk. An evaluation of the program indicated that 9 of 118 enrolled students attained General Educational Development (GED) certification during the 1996-97 academic year, a figure that did not meet the program's stipulated performance standard. YES reported a program-wide average daily attendance rate of 53.9%, a level of compliance that did not meet the performance standard. The program director, staff, and surveyed students all reported satisfaction with the way in which the YES GED program was implemented. Recommendations are made for contract renewal negotiations that include accountability requirements for student attendance and accumulation of program hours before counting them as program participants. Recommendations are also made to amend performance standards for GED certification. Appendixes contain the teacher and student surveys. (SLD)

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ED 428 168

RESEARCH

Report on an Educational Program

Department of Research and Accountability

Youth for Education and Success

(YES)

1996–97

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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Houston Independent School District

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Executive Summary

Youth for Education and Success (YES)

Program Description

Youth for Education and Success (YES) has contracted with the Houston Independent School District (HISD) to provide a community-based alternative education program for HISD eligible students who have dropped out of school and are considered as being at-risk. Criteria for being at-risk are as defined in §29.081 of the Texas Education Code (TEC), and are below. Students enrolled in the YES Program are under 21 years of age and are not concurrently enrolled in another educational program.

In accordance with the *Texas Education Code, §29.081*, the at-risk student is one in danger of dropping out of school, and includes each student in grade levels 7 through 12, who is under 21 years of age, and who:

- was not advanced from one grade level to the next for two or more school years;
- has mathematics or reading skills that are two or more years below grade level;
- did not maintain an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100, in two or more courses during a semester or is not maintaining such an average in two or more courses in the current semester, and is not expected to graduate within four years of the date the student begins ninth grade;
- did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered under Subchapter B, Chapter 39; or
- is pregnant or is a parent.

The Administrative Offices for YES are located at 5400 Griggs Road, Suite 210, Houston, Texas, 77004. Offices of the Program Director, faculty members, support staff, and all classroom facilities are housed at this location. The goal of this evaluation was to determine the efficacy of the YES program, in terms of numbers of students served and type(s) of service(s) provided. These goals are reflective of the performance specifications detailed in YES' contractual agreement with HISD. Performance specifications were framed as interrogatories for purposes of determining compliance, and are stated below:

1. Did at least 35 percent of students enrolled in GED classes obtain GED certification?
2. Was the program-wide attendance rate at least 85 percent?
3. What were the perceptions of the Program Director, faculty, and students with regard to the adequacy of the program?

Findings

- YES saw nine of 118 enrolled students attain GED certification during the 1996–97 academic year, for a compliance level of eight percent. YES did not meet the stipulated performance standard.

- YES reported a program wide average daily attendance (ADA) rate of 53.9 percent; this level of compliance did not meet the performance standard.

- The Program Director, faculty, and surveyed students all reported satisfaction with the manner in which the YES GED Program has been implemented.

Recommendations

1. Stipulations in Youth for Education and Success' contractual agreement with the District hold YES accountable for any student enrolled during the contract period, regardless of the length of time that individual was active in the GED program. Given that many students enroll in the program and leave after 1 or 2 days, it is recommended that negotiations for contract renewal include provisions stipulating accountability on the part of YES be predicated on: (a) student enrollment and

concurrent class attendance for a minimum of 10 weeks, and/or (b) student accumulation of a minimum of 200 program hours prior to inclusion of that individual in the database of students for whom the Project is held accountable at the end of the contract period.

2. In view of the demonstrated lack of commitment of the YES student population, as evinced by sporadic attendance and low scores on the GED Certification Exam, it is recommended that reconsideration be given to the current performance standards, with a view to adjustment in the percentages of students obtaining GED certification, as well as reducing the projected program-wide attendance rate.

YOUTH FOR EDUCATION AND SUCCESS (YES)

1996–97

Purpose: *To evaluate the performance of the Community Based Alternative Education Program's General Educational Development (GED) Program, as administered by Youth for Education and Success (YES) during the 1996–97 academic year.*

Design: *Descriptive/Compliance.*

Population, Sample: *Students enrolled at the YES facility during the 1996–97 academic year. These students were dropouts, or students otherwise at-risk for non-completion of their educational process.*

Methods: *Evaluation was based on data obtained during site visits and from questionnaires administered to the Program Director, faculty members, and a sample of students, as identified by the Program Director and various members of the faculty. Level of contractual compliance was based on data provided by school personnel.*

Findings: *Performance Standard One required a GED certification rate of 35 percent; YES attained a certification rate of eight percent, thus did not meet the contractual stipulation. Performance Standard Two stipulated an 85 percent program-wide attendance record; the attained attendance level of 53.9 percent did not meet the contract standard.*

Conclusions: *YES was not successful in meeting either of its two performance standards. YES may wish to consider adjustment of its current levels of contractual compliance prior to renewal of their contract with HISD for the 1997–98 academic year.*

Introduction

Program Description

Youth for Education and Success (YES) has contracted with the Houston Independent School District (HISD) to provide a community-based alternative education program for HISD eligible students who have dropped out of school and are considered as being at-risk. Criteria for being at-risk are as defined in §29.081 of the Texas Education Code (TEC), and are detailed in the chart that follows. Students enrolled in the YES Program are under 21 years of age and are not concurrently enrolled in another educational program.

The Administrative Offices for YES are located at 5400 Griggs Road, Suite 210, Houston, Texas, 77004. Offices of the Program Director, faculty members, support staff, and all classroom facilities are housed at this location.

Program Cost and Funding Source

HISD's program, as directed by Youth for Education and Success, was scheduled an allotment not to exceed $144,904.00, based on an anticipated enrollment of 75 HISD eligible students. This allotment was to be paid in six installments. Reimbursement to YES was accomplished through Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funding.

Purpose of Evaluation

The goal of this evaluation was to determine the efficacy of the YES program, in terms of numbers of students served and type(s) of service(s) provided. These goals are reflective of the performance specifications detailed in YES' contractual agreement with HISD. Performance specifications have been rewritten as interrogatories for evaluation purposes, and are stated below.

1. Did at least 35 percent of students enrolled in GED classes obtain GED certification?

At-Risk Criteria

In accordance with the *Texas Education Code, §29.081*, the at-risk student is one in danger of dropping out of school, and includes each student in grade levels 7 through 12, who is under 21 years of age, and who:

- was not advanced from one grade level to the next for two or more school years;
- has mathematics or reading skills that are two or more years below grade level;
- did not maintain an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100, in two or more courses during a semester or is not maintaining such an average in two or more courses in the current semester, and is not expected to graduate within four years of the date the student begins ninth grade;
- did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered under Subchapter B., Chapter 39; or
- is pregnant or is a parent.

2. Was the program-wide attendance rate at least 85 percent?
3. What were the perceptions of the Program Director, faculty, and students with regard to the adequacy of the program?

Method

YES was visited on three occasions during the contract period; an in-depth interview was conducted with the YES Program Director. At that time, faculty and student surveys were left with the Director for subsequent distribution and completion by all program participants.

The purpose of distributing surveys for completion by faculty and students was to obtain data for assessment of the concerns, opinions, and perceived levels of effectiveness of the program from the viewpoints of the individuals that completed them. Survey instruments for faculty and students employed statements with forced-choice responses presented in a Likert scale format; five response options were offered for each statement, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" and "N/A." Degree of agreement with forced-choice items was rated from one to four (1 to 4), on a four-point scale, with one to two (1 - 2) indicating disagreement and three to four (3 - 4) indicating agreement. Three open-ended items required both teachers and students to provide narrative responses.

Six students and three faculty members completed survey instruments; students completing surveys for this evaluation were selected by the faculty. The Director's Survey consisted entirely of open-ended questions. Compliance with contractually stipulated performance standards was determined by contrasting actual program performance with those standards, and then computing the percent of compliance. Descriptive statistics are presented in the Results section of this evaluation.

Student Survey Demographics

The sample of students surveyed, consisted of three males and three females. Student ethnographic data are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Ethnic Distribution of Surveyed Students

Ethnicity	Student Population		Survey Sample	
	n	Percent	n	Percent
Asian	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African-American	199	94	6	100
Hispanic	12	7	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	0 n/a	n/a
White	1	<1	n/a	n/a
TOTAL	212	100	6	100

Results

Did at least 35 percent of students enrolled in GED classes obtain GED certification?

Youth for Education and Success records indicated a total of 118 students enrolled in the program during the 1996–97 academic year. Of that number, nine students passed all parts of the GED exam, providing a certification rate of eight percent. YES did not meet the projected level of compliance with regard to this performance standard.

Was the program-wide attendance rate at least 85 percent?

Program-wide average daily attendance was 53.9

percent. YES did not meet the stipulated performance standard. Performance data are presented in **Table 2.**

Table 2: Percent of Compliance to Performance Specifications

Specification	Percent
At least 35% of students enrolled in the GED program obtained certification	8.0
Program-wide attendance was at least 85%	53.9

What were the perceptions of the Program Director, faculty, and students with regard to the adequacy of the program?

Summary of Director's Comments

Youth for Education and Success described its mission as the provision of a comprehensive set of programs and support services designed to alleviate the high dropout rate, academic deficiencies, chronic unemployment, and antisocial behaviors of a specific population of at-risk youth.

An intake interview was conducted with each student, and determined student eligibility and suitability for the program; data obtained during that interview were recorded on the Individual Student Strategy (ISS). Applicants eligible for program admission were assessed using the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) in order to identify deficiencies in basic skills and effect an appropriate level of placement within the program. Assessment of students continued throughout the student's tenure at YES, and utilized a variety of methods that included methods such as observation, oral questioning, worksheets and written assignments, pre- and posttest data, class presentations, demonstration performance projects, and standardized achievement tests such as the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and GED.

The program's instructional plan was based on an open entry/open exit approach that permitted the student to enter at an academic level appropriate to him or her, to progress at his or her individual pace, and to move to higher levels of training upon determination of proficiency at the current level. The teacher module was intensive, hands-on, teacher-directed, computer assisted, and competency based; it provided the student the latitude to progress in accordance with his or her abilities.

Classes were held from 8:30 A.M. until 12:30 P.M., Monday through Friday, for a total of 20 class hours per week. Program length was designed to coincide with HISD's calendar, and matched the 180-day span from the first day of school in the fall until the last day of scheduled attendance in the spring.

YES measured success in terms of student outcomes against desired outcomes and assessment. Desired outcomes for all students included raising the individual's level of reading and math skills by two grade levels and attaining high school equivalency certification. Assessment techniques used to determine success in achieving these outcomes were the TABE (pre- and posttest) and the GED test battery, respectively.

The Program Director indicated the only real obstacle faced by the program as having been acquisition of funding sufficient to implement programs that addressed the barriers that confronted at- risk youth. Programs that YES would like to initiate included an incentive program, a mentoring program, and a substance abuse and education program.

A major thrust of Youth for Education and Success was its effort to prepare at-risk youth for life beyond the classroom, through empowering those youth to break out of the cycle of poverty, failure, and hopelessness. YES hoped to accomplish that goal through its provision of a community-based education program that addressed the highly specific needs of that population. Specific tactics employed included preparation of at-risk youth for entry into employment, regardless of the barriers faced, and provision of counseling and support services supported by strong case management designed to increase self-esteem, self-discipline, respect for others, and instill a sense of community in the individual.

YES indicated its goals for the future to include formation of partnerships with HISD, Houston Community College System (HCCS), and Texas Workforce Connection (TWC) in the establishment of a system of comprehensive services that would combat barriers to education and employment within the economically disadvantaged neighborhoods of Southeast Houston. The accomplishment of these goals would be done through providing those communities with an array of services that would allow at-risk youth to complete their education, locate employment, and develop meaningful careers.

Summary of Teacher Comments

Faculty members found themselves to "Strongly Agree" that the GED program offered by Youth for Education and Success improved students' basic academic skills and provided students the requisite skills to enable them to continue on to other educational institutions. "Agreement" was indicated on the effectiveness of the program's intake and assessment procedures insofar as providing faculty and staff with sufficient data to adequately serve student needs, and with the program's ability to provide students with the skills necessary to conduct a successful job search. "Disagreement" was noted in teachers' confidence that the program was of assistance to students in the actual seeking of employment opportunities.

Summary of Student Comments

Six students completed and returned the YES Student Survey. Analysis of student responses indicated "Agreement" that teachers encouraged and challenged them to do their best, that classroom activities encouraged critical and analytical thought, and that they would recommend the YES program to their friends. Students "Disagreed" that teachers effectively related their lessons to those offered by teachers in other settings. Percentages of student agreement or disagreement with various aspects of the program, adjusted to percentages and rounded to the nearest integer, are presented in **Table 3.**

Table 3: Student Opinion: Percent of Agreement

Statement	Percent Agreement
1. Teachers encourage and challenge students to do their best.	100
2. The GED Program provides an adequate array of advanced course options.	100
3. Course work is challenging and exciting.	100
4. Class activities encourage critical thinking.	100
5. Class activities promote creativity.	84
6. Class activities encourage leadership skills development.	100
7. Class activities promote decision-making opportunities.	100
8. Homework amount is appropriate.	83
9. Teachers relate program material to that taught in other classes.	84
10. Teachers are sensitive to needs of students.	100
11. Class discipline is maintained.	83
12. Students would recommend this program to friends.	100

Discussion

Youth for Education and Success was unsuccessful in attainment of the performance standards as established in its contract with the District. As has been the case with other programs operating for the same purpose as does this one, YES now finds itself in the position of recognizing that the population it serves is both unreliable and unpredictable in terms of ability to live up to stated objectives. It is hoped that factor will serve to initiate reconsideration of those standards prior to renegotiation of said contract for the 1997–98 academic year.

Open-ended responses of faculty members indicated the self-paced learning environment and concern of both faculty and staff for the students as being the programs' strong points. Weaknesses identified included lack of textbooks, computers for student use, and audiovisual equipment. Additional deficiencies indicated were lack of a staff counselor and poor support form the community at large. Recommendations for improvements in the program included establishment of programs that would encourage student involvement in the community and thus, draw community leaders into involvement with the program. One faculty member suggested the program recruit and retain a full-time counselor, and initiate a program for staff development.

Student responses to open-ended questions revealed that the ability of the faculty to challenge and encourage students, and to stimulate critical and analytic thought to be perceived as the program's strongest point. Specifically detailed were the availability of one-on-one counseling, teachers' willingness to go the extra distance to help students, and teachers' level of concern for student welfare. Lack of staff was cited as the main weakness of the program; recommendations for improvement included acquisition of additional staff and computers for student use.

Recommendations

1. Stipulations in Youth for Education and Success' contractual agreement with the District hold YES

accountable for any student enrolled during the contract period, regardless of the length of time that individual was active in the GED program. Given that many students enroll in the program and leave after 1 or 2 days, it is recommended that negotiations for contract renewal include provisions stipulating accountability on the part of YES be predicated on: (a) student enrollment and concurrent class attendance for a minimum of 10 weeks, and/or (b) student accumulation of a minimum of 200 program hours prior to inclusion of that individual in the database of students for whom the Project is held accountable at the end of the contract period.

2. In view of the demonstrated lack of commitment of the YES student population, as evinced by sporadic attendance and low scores on the GED Certification Exam, it is recommended that reconsideration be given to the current performance standards, with a view to adjustment in the percentages of students obtaining GED certification, as well as reducing the projected program-wide attendance rate.

Reference

Houston Independent School District and Youth for Education and Success. (1996). Agreement between Houston Independent School District and Youth for Education and Success. Contract approved by the Houston Independent School District School Board on August 1, 1996.

APPENDIX A

GED PROGRAM
STUDENT SURVEY

INSTRUCTIONS: *The goal of this survey is to help us understand how you feel about the GED Program. We would appreciate you taking a few minutes toanswer the questions in this survey. Your answers are veryimportant to us. Please do not write your name on this survey, so that your answers will be anonymous. When you have completed this survey, pleasereturn it to your teacher who will send it to the HISD Research and Accountability Department.*

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Please use the scale below to tell us how you feel about the following statements.
Please mark the appropriate boxes for each sentence.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
1. The teachers at my school encourage and challenge me to do my best.	A	B	C	D	E
2. The GED program provides me with an adequate variety of advanced course options.	A	B	C	D	E
3. My course work is challenging and exciting.	A	B	C	D	E
4. My classroom activities encourage critical and analytical thinking (to think harder).	A	B	C	D	E
5. My classroom activities promote the development of creative abilities.	A	B	C	D	E
6. My classroom activities encourage the development of leadership skills.	A	B	C	D	E
7. My classroom activities provide opportunities to make decisions.	A	B	C	D	E
8 The amount of homework assigned by my teacher(s) is appropriate.	A	B	C	D	E
9. Teachers in the GED program relate their material to courses taught by other teachers.	A	B	C	D	E
10. The teachers in the GED program are sensitive to the needs of the students.	A	B	C	D	E
11. My school is able to maintain good discipline in the GED classrooms.	A	B	C	D	E
12. I would strongly recommend the GED to my friends.	A	B	C	D	E

13. What is your gender ?
A Female **B** Male

14. To which ethnic group do you belong?

Asian	African American	Hispanic	Native American	White
A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**

15. In your opinion, what are the major strengths (good points) of the GED program at your school?

16. In your opinion, what are the major weaknesses (areas that need improvement) of the GED program at your school?

17. If you have any other comments on how to improve the GED program, please write them in the space below.

Thank you very much for participating in this survey.

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APPENDIX B

GED Teacher Survey
1996-97

Please answer the following questions and return the survey to the Department of Research & Accountability. The purpose of this survey is to learn more about GED, your perceptions of its effectiveness, and any recommendations you may have to better serve your students. The answers will not be used to assess staff.

Using the scale below, put a check in the box that best represents your opinion.

	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
1. Intake and assessment procedures at this GED programprovide teachers and staff with adequate information to serve students' needs.	1	2	3	4	0
2. The instruction provided at this GED program improves students' basic academic skills.	1	2	3	4	0
3. This GED programprovides students with necessary basic skills to continue on to other educational institutions.	1	2	3	4	0
4. This GED program assists students in seeking further educational opportunities.	1	2	3	4	0
5. This GED program provides students with necessary job search skills.	1	2	3	4	0
6. This GED program assists students in seeking employment opportunities.	1	2	3	4	0
7. This program is able to address students' needs better than the traditional school setting.	1	2	3	4	0

8. In your opinion, what are the major strengths of this program?

9. In your opinion, what are the major weaknesses of this program, if any?

10. What recommendations would you make to better serve the students who are enrolled in this program?

Thank You for Responding